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Theology and Catechetical Renewal

Bernard Cooke, S.J.

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Theological Maturity

The events of our time are compelling American Catholics to strive for theological maturity. There is a crisis in marriage with loyal Catholics pleading with the Church to re-examine current teachings on birth control. There is a crisis in our concept of authority with many committed Catholics asking for more frank communication between hierarchy and laity, and for a total review of the relationship Christ desires between bishops and people. There is something like a crisis in faith with many observers acknowledging that the response of Catholic college students to the Church's teachings is not as unquestioning as it was even five years ago.

These can be glorious days for the Church. But they are tragic days for those who are unprepared for God's gifts. And there are many within the Church who will feel this tragedy with increasing distress largely because of their unpreparedness and consequent resistance to needed change.

"A profound change is taking place in the Church's self-awareness," says Father Charles Davis. "External changes are in a sense only symptomatic. The important change goes much deeper. A thorough-going renewal in the understanding of the faith is the order of the day."

About five years ago, the Paulist Press at Glen Rock, New Jersey, began to issue its continuing *Doctrinal Pamphlet Series* to acquaint English-speaking Catholics with the latest insights into the Church's doctrinal teachings. Another continuing series of booklets, giving a fuller treatment of similar topics, is now available from the same press under the general title: *Insight Series*.

An ambitious and distinguished contribution of the Paulist Press is a series of books entitled *Concilium: "Theology in an Age of Renewal."* Ten volumes a year will appear on ten major sections of Catholic theology, all containing chapters by our most able contemporary theologians.

If you are convinced that theological maturity is one of our greatest needs, you might examine these three series yourself—and make them available to your parishioners.

JOHN T. MCGINN, C.S.P.

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Theology and Catechetical Renewal

Bernard Cooke, S.J.

Significant New Theological Insights

One of the things that augurs best for the continuing development of the catechetical apostolate in the present-day Church is its deep grounding in the contemporary developments of theology itself. Because of the growth of biblical studies and consequent biblical theology, because of the development of liturgical and sacramental theology, as well as fresh theological understanding of the Church, there is a great reserve of deepened faith—understanding that can feed into a reevaluation of religious education. This present essay will try to describe this impact of theology on the development of catechetical instruction.

There are of course many ways one might study the influence of theology on contemporary catechetics. For example one might sketch the increased theological attention to the sources of faith, especially scripture and sacramental life, and show how this has caused a new selection of material both for theological writing and research and for catechetical instruction. Unquestionably this summation would do much to clarify the relationship between these two areas of growth, but it is also something that has been done fairly well a number of times. This particular essay will attempt rather

to study the various elements in theology which impinge upon catechetics, keeping the catechetical point of view as its guiding norm. The paper will try to discuss three elements: 1) the theological developments which touch upon God as communicating himself to man; 2) theological developments regarding man as seen by faith; 3) theological developments which touch upon the Church or, if you will, upon the community aspect of Christianity.

As is often being remarked, one of the most promising features of present-day theological development, both in Catholic and Protestant circles, is the emphasis on the mystery of the resurrection. While this emphasis has been rooted very largely in the recent development of New Testament theology, it is being incorporated into the whole synthesis of systematic theology and promises to play an increasingly important role in this area. Perhaps the aspect of the resurrection which touches most importantly on catechetics is the fact that it draws attention to the *continuing revela-*

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tion of the Father in the mystery of the risen Christ.

Christians have always known that Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in visible historical form two thousand years ago, is still alive and with us; but for the most part little attention was drawn to this fact, and few conclusions drawn from it either in theology or in religious education. Particularly since the appearance of Durrwell's work on the subject, both theologians and religious educators have now drawn attention to the presence of Christ, not only divine but also human, in the mystery of the Church. Moreover they have emphasized that resurrection means not only the fact that Christ is no longer dead, but also that he lives now with *new life*. Resurrection means not only a coming back to life, but also the beginning of an entirely transformed way of human existing.

THE LIVING CHRIST

There are many ramifications of this particular emphasis in theology—in our notion of the Church, in the idea of grace, in the understanding of faith—but perhaps most important is the recaptured sense of the presence of Christ in those who are the members of his Church. While Catholic theology has lost none of its sense of the importance of the eucharistic presence of Christ, there is a regained awareness of the presence of Christ in those who form the Christian community. Not only theology and religious education but also Christian prayer are deeply affected by this awareness that Christ abides with those who make up the Church at any given period of time.

This theological emphasis is only now beginning to be felt on a wide scale in the Church's thinking; but it has already influenced catechetical theory and practice, and will do so even more. Catechetical leaders, grounding their own practice in the pedagogical methods of the primitive Christian community (as we find them reflected in the Acts of the Apostles), are making the mystery of the resurrection the core of their presentation of Christianity. Once again, as in the early days of Christianity, the gospel is seen to be "an announcing to the world of the good news" that death has been overcome in the person of This

Man who, having passed through the portals of death, lives now no more to die.

One can easily see the reorientation of emphasis which this return to the doctrine of the resurrection is bound to have. While religious education will continue to center upon the figure of Christ as it has tended to do in more recent times, it will point not to Christ of two thousand years ago but to the Christ who is present in his followers at the present moment. Thus the importance of the new emphasis on the risen Christ is not just that this element of revelation will receive new stress; this emphasis creates a whole new context or atmosphere for the communication of the Christian faith. It creates a sense of immediacy, a sense of reality; it prepares for that impact which comes through direct encounter with the Person of Christ.

More is contained in this mystery of the resurrection than the fact that Christ has not left his Church but still abides with it. The heavenly Father who sent Christ into this world still speaks to the men of our day in and through this Son become man. In his Son the Father is at the present moment revealing to the men of our own day his providential and fatherly love and his desire to communicate himself to them in his Word, this Word which alone can adequately express him. The Father works creatively to transform both the understanding and the being of men, changing them truly into sons of God.

Mention of the Father's continuing revelation to mankind brings us into contact with a second area of theological development which is of considerable import for religious education: the study of the divine Word's function in salvation history. At the present time there is a great deal of theological discussion and research in the area of what one might call "supernatural communications." That process by which God unfolds to mankind an understanding of himself is being examined in the light of contemporary developments in fields of knowledge such as anthropology and psychology. All of the traditional categories which bear upon this particular area—revelation, tradition, inspiration, prophecy—are being examined anew and seen in a somewhat fresh and deeper way.

As biblical studies draw continuing attention to the importance of the notion of

vation history, theologians are increasingly aware that "revelation" must be considered in a much broader context. It is essentially in the events of what is called sacred history that this God has manifested to mankind the kind of a divinity he is in their regard. However the events themselves are not sufficient to convey to man the understanding which God intends; in conjunction with these events certain special understanding has been given to individuals such as Moses and the prophets—and above all to Christ in his humanity—in order that they may communicate to others the deeper message which the divine tradition contains. It is the combination of these elements, the special divine activity in history and the special understandings of these events given by God, which make up the process of supernatural revelation.

REVELATION AND COMMUNITY

Supernatural revelation is retained and developed within the social existence of that community (ancient Israel or the Church) in which the events occur. Over the centuries the recollection of God's deeds and the faith understanding of these deeds was preserved and handed on from generation to generation, not just by specialized groups such as prophets and priests but by the entire social structure of the people in question. While this process of handing on (tradition) has jealously preserved the sacred truth entrusted to the community, there has been a constant process of applying to the understanding of this deposit of faith the understandings of life which man has acquired in the course of his historical existence. Thus revelation has been guarded for us up to the present moment, and this is a dynamic and developing process which, always faithful to the original faith insights, included evolving clarification.

At given points in history, in order to guarantee the authenticity of this process of tradition, certain individuals have been specially directed by God (by what we call inspiration) to write down the traditions of the community as they then existed. Each scriptural inspiration does not necessarily involve new insights into revelation or any further clarification of the revelation already understood by the community, but rather a genuine reflection of these in written form. Issuing to quite an

extent from the community situation, the inspired writings were recognized by this community as the special word of God and gathered together into what we now call the Old and New Testaments.

Contemporary theology sees the process of divine communication to man as a complex reality that involves the entire history of the people of the Old Testament as well as of the New Testament people of God. While no essentially new event has entered the picture since the end of the apostolic period, the processes of tradition have continued to the present day and will do so until the end of time. The focus of this community preservation of the word of God is to be found in the sacred scriptures and in the teachers officially deputed to preserve and explain them; still there is a valid application of the word tradition to the entire on-going life of the present-day Christian community.

Into this larger picture of the preservation and development of revealed truth religious pedagogy is situated. It is one of the functions, and a very important function, of the Church in safeguarding an accurate understanding of divine revelation and in communicating it to succeeding generations. The fact that religious education finds itself so situated dictates to it the guidelines of its own pedagogy.

MAN SEEN BY FAITH

The immediacy of the risen Christ to the Church would indicate a highly personal context for the communication of religious understanding in contemporary catechetics. This new context is gradually being realized and the realization will be further intensified by the present theological investigation into what one might call the "personal aspect" of revelation. Under the impact of many factors, among them the awakened understanding of the human person in modern thought, contemporary theology is deeply concerned with studying the key elements in revelation from the point of view of their personal implications.

This trend is seen in present theological understanding of the mystery of grace. Moving away somewhat from the post-Reformation emphasis on grace as justification or on the role of actual grace in making human moral behavior efficacious, theologians are concentrating on the role of sanc-

tifying grace in the life of the individual Christian as well as in the Christian community. One of the most fascinating developments is suggested by the studies which indicate that grace consists basically in a relatedness of the Christian to the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. Because of this new reality (grace) the Christian finds himself in a situation of son-ship, a situation which relates him differently to each of the three divine Persons and permits him to enter into a truly personal communication of knowledge and love with them.

GRACE AND LIFE

Seen in this way, grace is not something superimposed on the human person but something which enters into him to transform and fulfill him as person. The supernatural order in no way detracts from the orientations of man to personal development and achievement, but truly opens up the capacities of his personal being to yet fuller participation in knowledge and in love. If persons develop in terms of their mature relatedness to other persons, the fact that grace sets up a situation of friendship with the three divine Persons means that entirely unprecedented possibilities of human maturity and growth enter the picture.

Seen in this way the life of grace is an integral element in human existing. Its development is not a question of peripheral and superadded practices, somewhat detached and apart from the normal course of human living; rather that which is the highest expression of the life of grace, charity, is found at the very center of all true human activity. When one says that a person develops in proportion to his capacity to love, one is stating in another form the oft-repeated truth that one's sanctity is measurable most properly by the extent of one's charity.

It is quite apparent how this approach to the understanding of sanctifying grace is of immense importance for the catechist. It points to the fact that grace is not to be explained primarily in terms of a reality given to man in order that he may be more correct in his ethical behavior. Rather grace is the foundation for the mystery of friendship with the three divine Persons. Grace is seen as something given the indi-

vidual so that he can become more truly the person he is meant to be. Thus there is an openness, a sense of freedom, a sense of personal importance, rather than the sense of restriction and imposition sometimes found in the older emphasis on the ten commandments and on conformity to law as being the essence of the life of grace.

Another element closely associated with this recent understanding of grace is the theological development, in the years following World War II, of the notion of faith. Aware of the danger that one can understand faith in an excessively subjective and therefore relativist sense, Catholic theology until very recently laid great emphasis on the intellectual or rational elements in the act of faith. In the past couple of decades, while in no way denying the intellectual nature of faith, Catholic theologians have been much more open to what one might call the "personal commitment" aspects of faith. Today in most contemporary theological literature one reads that faith is to be seen in terms of personal acceptance of the mystery of Christ, that it is the response which occurs in encounter with this Person who is the Father's Word come into history, that faith is a commitment one makes to become involved in the practical living out of the mystery of Christ in the community of faith.

FAITH AND FREEDOM

More keenly than ever before, faith is seen to be what Vatican Council I already declared it to be, an act of freedom. It is essentially a choice which a Christian makes of a way of life, a choice made at baptism, reiterated in confirmation and re-expressed in each celebration of the eucharistic mystery. It is this choice which is at the very center of the development of the life of grace. Thus grace and personality develop integrally, for mature exercise of freedom is also the necessary condition for the growth of a genuine person. This theological understanding of faith is essentially and necessarily a religion of freedom. Any instruction with regard to development of Christian life must emphasize the growth of the ability to choose.

All this points out for the catechist the need of communicating the Christian faith in a way which leads to authentic Christian

self-commitment. Mere informational acquisition is insufficient if it does not lead to the understanding that one must become Christian. The process of choosing Christ, converting from an insufficient expression of Christian living into a more genuine living of self, is a continuing thing in the Christian's existence. True catechesis must therefore make it possible for the student to find himself in that situation of faith-encounter which will challenge and motivate him to the profound personal choice of the Christian way of life.

SIN AS REJECTION

Correlative with the theological development regarding grace and faith is the deepening understanding of sin. Partially because of contemporary growth in the psychological understanding of guilt, theologians are clarifying the fact that sin is self-denying, self-destroying. Just as grace is the development and fulfillment of the human personality, so sin is seen to be an evil because of what it does to the human person. It is a denial of the essential finality of a person to open out onto reality and move all onto other persons. Sin leads to perversion of self-expression, leads to a gradual deterioration of the person's capacity to confront reality with authenticity and to open out in generosity to other persons. More profoundly sin is seen to be a denial of the divine offer of friendship. Biblical theology, with its insistence upon divine vocation as a call to participation in familiarity with the three divine Persons, has done much to highlight the nature of sin as a rejection of friendship, as a fundamental infidelity.

While moral theology has not abandoned the investigation of sin as opposition to law, it has deepened this very notion by insisting that sin most basically denies acceptance of the fundamental law of charity. This theological development has done much to highlight the persistent problem of forming a mature conscience in the Christian. Considerable discussion during the last couple decades has been directed to this practical theological question, a question that is of particular importance for the religious pedagogue. It is to this latter that in large measure the informational aspect of developing of conscience is com-

mitted. It is the religious pedagogue who must give those understandings of human behavior and human development which will permit the Christian to advance consciously in the development of himself as a deciding being.

Clearly this says much about the way in which catechesis must present the whole mystery of evil in human life, how it must outline for the Christian his responsibilities in the moral order. While the elements of conformity to law and fear of a just God can never be neglected, still in the formation of conscience fear cannot become the governing motivation. Rather the context of love and freedom dictated by the renewed understandings of the resurrection, of grace and of divine Fatherhood must be preserved in teaching the evil of sin. Maturity in conscience must develop as maturity in power of Christian judgment and decision. One of the major tasks of present-day religious education is to develop an effective approach to conscience formation.

THEOLOGY OF HISTORY

The last aspect of contemporary developments regarding man as seen by faith touches man's function in the historical process. Man in history, more specifically the Christian in history, is the bearer of divine wisdom and love. To him has been committed the task of witnessing to the intervention of God in human history, to the continuing work of the three divine Persons as they guide man in his historical existence toward the destiny of sharing in divine life. Not just individual human beings but the whole process of human life, the societal existence of man, is meant to be Christianized. This Christianization will be a redemption of all that makes up the context of human living; this redemption must be accomplished by the Christians who live in the midst of men, who witness to the life-giving Word of God and who transform by their own love the patterns of human choice and behavior.

Contemporary theology has advanced much in developing what may eventuate as a true theology of history. As never before theologians are aware of the importance of the historical dimension of divine revelation and divine activity. History as a necessary and characteristic context of Chris-

tianity is being investigated as an element of Christian truth which must be understood in order that it may then be sanctified.

Drawing from this theological emphasis on sacred history and the Christianization of present-day history, the religious educator has a task of directing the student outward to the Christian task which faces him. The catechist must prepare his student for life, life which because Christian is essentially apostolic and missionary. It is not enough for the catechist to give his students those elements of understanding which will allow him to develop and perfect his own individual existence: he must make clear to the student the responsibility which he bears because of his baptismal entry into the mystery of Christianizing the world. Until fairly recently there was an individualism in Christian thought and in Christian instruction which somewhat belied the orientation given Christian life by Christ himself. In our own day there has been an awakening to the need of seeing Christianity as the social mystery which it really is, and the catechist shares most importantly in the task of reawakening the Christian people to this wider frame of reference. The task leads us naturally into our third major portion of discussion, theological developments with regard to the Church.

THE CHURCH

Our modern world is one that is marked by awareness of the unity of mankind. Because of developments in the realm of communications, of travel, of information, the world has become increasingly one. While this oneness raises certain problems in the religious sphere, it opens up, really for the first time in the history of western Christianity, the potential for creating a Christian community embracing all peoples of the earth.

Reflecting this contemporary situation, the theology of the present day has developed most importantly its understanding of the mystery of the Church. Basing itself on a return to biblical understandings, Catholic theology is studying the Church less in terms of its canonical aspects, its institutional structure. Rather it is examining the Church as a community, as the new people

of God. The Church is seen as a mystery in direct continuity with the mystery of Old Testament Israel, as fulfillment of those centuries of preparation which were carried on in the context of a religious community. The Church as a people is seen to be not so much a grouping of teachers and taught, of rulers and ruled, but rather as "the family of God."

This perspective raises for religious educators the question of how most validly to present the mystery of the Church. It is important that their students obtain a true and meaningful insight into the community reality of the Church, and that they feel themselves to be part of this mystery. It is important too that while they retain a correct understanding of the institutional side of the Church, a genuine and mature respect for the elements of authority and law, they still learn to regard the Church for what it is: a community of believers, a community gathered in worship around the altar of God.

SALVATION HISTORY

In this understanding of the Church as something dynamic, something growing and developing, precisely because it is a community of persons in history, the whole notion of salvation history seems increasingly important. If the Church is a reality in history, a reality essentially historical in its being, then somehow or another historical methods must be utilized in providing this sort of insight. If the Church is to be considered an outgrowth of the history of salvation which preceded it and which is itself a continuing mystery of God's workings in the midst of mankind, then salvation history must be considered a reality which is not just of the past but which continues through the present into the future. To teach the Church in this way means that one must teach it in its roots and in its present existence, but also in its movement toward the future, toward its eschatological realization.

In our own day theology has reemphasized the notion that the Church is the body of Christ, that it is somehow an organic and vital reality, a living and developing reality. Organized under authority into a society the Christian community is in its depths the mystery of the abiding

presence of Christ in the Spirit. It is that which as "body" expresses Christ, "translates" him meaningfully to the men of our present day as it has to the men of the past two thousand years. The Church's life of faith and charity embodies the mystery of Christ himself as Wisdom and Love in our contemporary world.

Not only is the Church as a society seen in present-day theology in this more vital fashion, but the individual Christian himself is seen to be a living part of this mystery. Christians are, as St. Paul would say, "the living stones" out of which this growing, developing temple of the spirit is fashioned. Each Christian, as well as the total Christian community, is meant to be a sacrament of Christ, manifesting externally to the men of our day the continuing mystery of Christ in our midst. The Christian community must continuously announce the mystery of Christ overcoming death in resurrection. Its charity is meant to touch all mankind and transform it. In and through the Christian community Christ himself abides in our world, re-creating it so that it becomes a truly Christian world.

A LIVING LITURGY

Again, the catechetical task seems rather obvious: to present the Church as a static organization is to betray the task which confronts us. Only when Christians understand the living reality of the Church alive because of the risen Christ in its midst, sharing in this spiritualized existence which he has, will a real understanding of the Church flow out into deepened Christianized life and worship. Before Catholics can understand the task of witnessing to the present mystery of the risen Christ they must understand who they are in this mystery and how they are meant to function. The religious pedagogue must find the means of clarifying the sacramental world of each individual Christian as well as the larger sacramental task of the community as such. This he cannot do by himself, for the true realization of the living community can come to its members only in the experience which is proper to the Church of Christ: eucharistic sacrifice. However it is the catechist's task to prepare those whom he instructs for the experience, meaningful and practical, of vital liturgy.

It is apparent then that one of the most important areas of instruction which must be given by the catechist is that which deals with the Christian sacraments. Here again there are important developments in present-day Catholic theology from which religious education can and must draw. Few if any areas of theological investigation are developing as rapidly as is sacramental theology. Sacraments are being understood more profoundly than ever before as actions, actions simultaneously of Christ and of his Church, actions which have their efficacy precisely because they are acts of the risen Christ expressing himself through the instrumentality of his Body.

THE SACRAMENTS

Since sacraments, and above all the key sacrament of the Eucharist, are the actions of Christ working in the Church at the present time, they are privileged situations for encountering Christ. It is in the sacraments that Christians come into contact with the risen Christ in his contemporary operation. It is in the sacraments that most totally Christ speaks to the modern world his transforming wisdom and love. For this reason it is only in sacramental actions that the experiential understanding of Christianity can be fully achieved. It is only in this situation of direct encounter with the mystery of salvation that the faith of the Christian community can be both professed and deepened.

Not only are sacraments actions of Christ, they are also actions of the Christian community. They are the actions which profess its acceptance of the reality of Christianity and its commitment to the task of Christianizing the world. Sacraments are the situations expressing that charity which is meant to be a bond of vital union between Christians and which directs them toward the salvation of their fellow men. For this reason sacraments are not only fulfillment of religious obligation as they have so often been considered by Catholics; they are the very wellspring of Christian activity and Christian faith. However they are "words," that is to say, actions which express meaningfulness; and in order that they have the meaning which they are intended to possess, meaning which may be effective as cause of grace, the Christian

community must be made more conscious of its actions so that it can perform them with truer inner meaning.

To put it another way, one can say that meaningful liturgical ceremony, meaningful liturgical life is intrinsically dependent on correct catechesis in sacraments. For a Christian community consciously to offer the sacrifice of Christ's death and resurrection, it must be conscious of the way in which the action it performs at Mass is truly sacrificial. In order for Christians to commit themselves in this moment of supreme decision, they must be instructed with regard to the way in which the Mass is a context of decision and instructed as to the implications of this decision. The task of the religious educator with respect to liturgy is one of capital importance. If he succeeds in making the sacramental action an understood reality he has in very large measure succeeded in the task which is his in the mystery of the Church. On the other hand if he has failed to direct those whom he instructs toward a more meaningful participation in the liturgical ceremony, he cannot satisfy his conscience with regard to his catechetical function.

LITURGY TEACHES

However it is at this point that the catechist must give way to the liturgical ceremony itself as the supreme occasion for religious education. While he can prepare his students for this sacred action, it is the action itself performed with meaning and with sincerity which instructs most importantly with regard to the meaning of Christianity. Faith is an act of understanding which is essentially experiential; it is an assent to the real and personal context of the Christian mystery; it is an assent to the on-going mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ as shared by each individual Christian and by the community of the faithful. Only in the liturgical ceremony itself can such an experience really be encountered; for this reason there must be a most important conformity and integration of religious instruction and liturgical practice. At this point religious theory and pastoral theology merge and become almost indistinguishable one from the other.

One last point regarding theological developments in the area of the Church might

be mentioned because of its widespread importance in the religious life of our Catholic people. This is the theological investigation of the mystery of Mary. Few if any periods of the Church's theological life have seen as intensive a development of mariology as our own century. But not only has there been a quantitative development. There has also been, and that with marked emphasis, a redirection of theological study of Mary, a reintegration of mariology with ecclesiology. Increasingly, the mystery of Mary is seen to be part of the mystery of the Church. Her role, her grace and her person are studied in relationship to the wider community of the faithful. Mary is viewed not as a mystery apart, as if she were parallel to the mystery of Christ as object of the Church's devotion and study, but as part of the mystery of the Church itself. Mary is seen to be within the Church the perfect Christian, the exemplar of Christian sanctity, prayer and activity.

DEVOTION TO MARY

This point is of great practical importance for catechetics because of the orientation it provides not just for Christian understanding but for Christian prayer and life. Devotedness to Mary has always been one of the hallmarks of genuine Christian life, and it is essential for the authentic development of the Christian spirit that an accurate devotedness to Mary be provided our Christian people. Mary as exemplar of what a Christian should be in the mystery of the Church must be provided so that there will be an entry into the practice of Christian life which retains all the warmth and familiarity connected with her motherhood and which yet retains the profound mystery of her grace. To neglect an accurate and realistic catechesis of Mary would be to deprive the Christian faithful of an ideal of Christian life which they require for their integral development, an ideal provided them by God as a guide to a truly personal entry into relationship with Christ himself.

If there is one thing that stands out in this rather complex development of contemporary theology and its impact on modern catechetics it is the awakened interest in the divine action in history. This divine action, as a process that develops over the

enturies, continues into the present and is directed into the future, is that to which our understanding must be directed and our activity conformed. This divine action is the basic pattern for the development of the Christian community and for the development of Christian understanding. As one examines what it is that God has been doing with the human race over the past millennia, one begins to realize what elements of divine pedagogy have been functioning to give man that understanding of himself and of his God which God wishes.

For this reason genuine catechesis must become increasingly aware of this divine process which instructs the faith-life of man. What is this divine process of transforming human into a son of God? If it is not to work at cross purposes with the divine activity catechesis must conform itself to the divine pattern of action. The laws intrinsic

in the process of revelation for the development of faith must become the principles guiding our modern catechetical reconstruction. Truly perceptive theology of this divine action is a necessary guide and source for the catechist in the reappraisal of his own activity and in the construction of a truly valid and effective catechesis. As we mentioned earlier in this essay, the function of the religious educator fits integrally into the present-day action of God in the mystery of the Church: through community life, sacramental encounter and religious instruction. God works to Christianize his people and those whom they meet. The process of religious education must conform itself in its own development to this divine direction or pay the penalty of being a disruptive and limiting force rather than a true instrument of the Spirit of God.

There is some resistance to the new changes. Against the liturgical movement, those who support so warmly the renewal called for by the Church, there may be a counter-movement of protest, both spoken and silent. Some tend to think of this as a block of reaction. Yet it is no more rightist than liturgists are leftists. The resistance is not made up of elderly ladies in devotional tennis shoes, nor ecclesiastical generals and admirals retired from clerical reality. Most of those who are holding back are devout and dedicated Catholics who love God and serve their fellow men. Your role among them calls for special tact, a sub-virtue under the gift of charity. Zeal we need; indeed zeal for the liturgy is a sign of the providential disposition of God in our time.

But we also need tact, and courtesy, and kindness, and persuasion, and all these are the ways of charity. The law of love has not been repealed by the new Constitution, and it would be a blasphemy to act as if it had. As America put it lately, "The whole Church rejoices with the worshiping diocese or parish. It neither takes umbrage at the initiatives of individual bishops, nor seeks to bring to a speedy end the scruples of those who cannot adjust to the new rules." Those who love the liturgy must be a real elite, and its foremost mark should be a deep humility. Most of us can confess quite easily, in the presence of some non-liturgical colleague, "There but for the grace of God and Mediator Dei—go I!"

Most Rev. Paul Hallinan at the 25th North American Liturgical Week, St. Louis, 1964.

Apologetics and Biblical Scholarship

John J. Kelliher

New Approaches in Pastoral Apologetics

For the Christian apologist the short term of life granted to the utility of his work is an occupational hazard. If he is to meet the difficulties and anxieties of his own contemporaries, he cannot expect that his work will have the same effectiveness in a later generation that it may have in his own. John J. Heaney, S.J., in the preface to *Faith, Reason, and the Gospels* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1961), indicates the problem that this has posed for present day apologetics: "With the death of the 'old' apologetic which was caused by lethal doses of the over-proof, a vacuum seems to have been created." In an attempt to fill that void, Avery Dulles, S.J., from the vantage point of the most recent biblical scholarship has written this short and very timely book (*Apologetics and the Biblical Christ*. The Newman Press).

Father Dulles begins his study with a brief look at the historical effectiveness of modern Christian apologetics. He feels that "Christian polemics have hardly ever succeeded in rising above the prevailing assumptions of a given age," and the apologists of the early twentieth century were not exceptions to this norm. The so-called "historicists" had demanded that dogmatic

presuppositions be set aside and that the bible be analyzed by the same norms which applied to profane historical sources. These contemporary apologists responded with what Father Dulles calls the "historicist apologetic." They concentrated on establishing the authenticity and veracity of the gospels, feeling that once this was accomplished, the rest was easy. For if the Evangelists faithfully reported what they knew to be true, then all that they had written was objective, historical fact.

In an age which gave its unqualified respect to the powers of the positive historical method, this attempt was impressive. However, more recent historiographers feel that the object of academic history is simply the phenomenal past and that it can do no more than frame the most plausible hypothesis regarding what actually happened. This hypothesis is bound to differ according to the presuppositions with which any study is begun, and these will differ with each historian. History, therefore, cannot of itself impose any definite conclusions regarding the doctrine and behavior of Jesus; still less can it give religious interpretation to the facts.

Just as important as the problem con-

erning academic history's ability to interpret the bible, is the question of the amount and type of history actually contained in the gospels. Most modern scholars agree that "The Gospels do not profess to be memoirs or even, in the modern sense, biographies. They are, first and foremost, gospels, that is to say, proclamations of the good news of what God had done for mankind in Jesus Christ. The Gospels are not the work of detached observers, whose first aim is descriptive accuracy. They are written *ex fide* (as expressions of faith) and *pro fide* (to kindle faith in the reader)."

As a result, before giving an opinion on the historicity of a particular text, one must first consider a great complexity of factors, and in most matters will have to be satisfied with a provisional and probable answer. Even with these difficulties in mind, all reputable scholars, Catholic and non-Catholic, agree on the basic outline of Jesus' life, i.e., that he was a religious teacher in Palestine who was hailed as a wonder-worker and Messiah and that his popularity aroused such opposition from the Jewish priests and Pharisees that he was led to trial and crucified under Pontius Pilate.

APOLOGETIC TASK

It is for the apologist to show that Jesus did in fact perform prodigies, that he was Messiah and God, and that after his death he rose from the tomb. But he cannot hope to accomplish this on the strength of pure history, for the fact is that the Evangelists did not pretend to be impartial historians. They wrote as worshipping disciples, and as such they spoke only to potential or actual believers.

For the purely rational inquirer, however, there must be some indication that the New Testament portrayal of Christ is authentic and therefore credible. Admitting that the criteria for examining these personal attestations of faith must differ from those applied to historical documents, Father Dulles asserts reasons for accepting the credibility of the gospels in terms of various indices, viz., the qualities of the testimony itself. Certainly the overriding unity in the New Testament vision of Christ indicates that the traditions were not allowed to include rumor, but were composed under the vigilance of the Apostles

and their successors. Moreover, this vision was proclaimed with unquestioned conviction, notwithstanding its utter novelty. "How can one explain, if not through a revelation, that [the New Testament authors] now so confidently and unanimously look upon this Galilean carpenter as Lord of the universe?"

The Apostles themselves, of humble and unassuming origin, were transformed into missionaries whose dynamism was inexplicable except in terms of a revelation; and the "good news" they proclaimed was perhaps the greatest marvel of all. If their message was true, we can account for the attributes of that message and the witness of the primitive Church; if it was false, the faith of the first Christians is an insoluble enigma.

RELIGIOUS TESTIMONY

This "apologetic of religious testimony," as Father Dulles calls it, accepts the gospel's character as a confessional document. It does not study it as a sterile object of historical inquiry, but presents its message as it is: a challenge and a request for a personal surrender of faith. Once it is perceived that faith in Jesus necessarily involves faith in those chosen disciples who perpetuated his memory, the New Testament can be accepted with all that it involves: testimony, invitation, response, commitment, fidelity, and communion.

In his last two chapters, Father Dulles contrasts the historicist apologetic with the apologetic of religious testimony in a treatment of two crucial apologetic problems: the resurrection and the divinity of Christ. The believer, basing his faith on the testimony of the New Testament, accepts the resurrection as historical fact. Nevertheless, Father Dulles submits "that there is also a sense in which the resurrection is nonhistorical." The apparitions do not seem to be of a type that fall within the normal province of

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Rev. Mr. Kelliher, in this extended book review of *Apologetics and the Biblical Christ* by Avery Dulles, S.J., makes some penetrating observations regarding a difficult subject for the pastoral apologist. A chapter from this book appeared in *Guide*, June-July 1964, which attracted considerable favorable attention.

historical science. A careful reading of the resurrection accounts indicates that to recognize the risen Jesus was a grace: "Jesus appeared not to all the people but to witnesses designated beforehand by God" (Acts 10:41). Even these witnesses, disciples, experienced difficulty in recognizing him, e.g., Mary Magdalene and the "gardener," the disciples and their "companion" on the road to Emmaus. Once they were granted the grace of recognition, however, their conviction was unshakeable:

"In their initial preaching . . . they do not bother to state the details of how they have been convinced. Still less do they try to prove the fact by historical witnesses. Instead they speak as authoritative witnesses. They announce the dogma as something to be accepted on their word as divinely appointed heralds."

RESURRECTION CREDIBLE

In the Gospels, the resurrection appears as the central event by which God offers hope of redemption; it is the culmination of the history of Israel and, in the context of Pentecost, the inauguration of the final age. In this religious context it becomes supremely credible: it is a singular act of God at a singular juncture in history. To tear it from this context in a historicist apologetic is to do Christianity a disservice.

Concerning the divinity of Christ, the historicist also has a ready answer: in the gospels Jesus claims to be God; he authenticates his claim with miracles; since only God is the principal cause of a miracle and would not so seal a false claim, Jesus must be God: Father Dulles finds this answer unsatisfactory and disconcerting. If Jesus did work miracles, do they prove him to be God? Could he not have been an agent of God? And if he did claim to be divine, it seems impossible to think that he would have accepted as a disciple anyone who would not admit that he was God. But during the life of Jesus did even the Apostles make such an admission? Two of them seem to

have *lost all faith in Jesus* after his crucifixion (Lk. 24:21), and the first chapter of Acts reports that on the very day of his ascension the disciples asked about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel (1:6).

With a touch of irony, the author concludes that the modern reader searching the words and deeds of Jesus for a clear presentation of his divinity "cannot hope to rise notably above the level achieved by Jesus' own disciples." However, if he regards the New Testament writings primarily as a source of religious testimony, he will readily see that the New Testament authors were all firmly convinced by Jesus' divinity; but the full realization of this did not come until Pentecost: "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3).

APOSTOLIC TESTIMONY

Once again, Father Dulles submits, it is the apostolic testimony itself that gives credibility to the confession. They proclaimed a belief which no Jew could ever have conceived himself—a fact suggesting the possibility that it came from an actual revelation. But their belief in the dogma of the Incarnation must be viewed as part of the complex that is the New Testament message: ". . . in the last analysis the motives of credibility elude formulation. By an immensely complex assessment of a thousand converging factors we arrive at the persuasion that the doctrine can and ought to be accepted."

In five brief chapters Father Dulles has developed a remarkable *apologia* for the apologetic of religious testimony. The supplementary readings recommended at the end of each chapter indicate the direction that further investigation should take. This book should be on the required reading list for every Catholic college course in apologetics and on the shelves of every Newman Club library. Its contents will enrich the faith of every Christian who seeks in the Bible a credible basis for belief.

Books Received

What Modern Catholics Think
about Birth Control.

Edited by William Birmingham

Signet Book (Paperback) 75 cents.

There are fifteen contributors to this volume on a topic of universal concern, one which poses a challenging question to the conscience of every Catholic. Each of the writers is a lay person, none of them is a professional theologian, but many of them are noted writers or teachers, and many manifest an unusual ability. All the writers are committed Catholics. They are writing "within" the Church. And if there is eloquence, sharpness and deep feeling to what they say, this arises from an anguish of conscience which seeks to learn where true obedience lies.

This is one of the most striking of the many books to appear recently on this subject, one which could hardly have been conceived previous to Vatican II.

These writers deserve a hearing, not only for the light they throw on their specific subject but for the questions they raise regarding issues vital to the current Catholic renewal. Garry Wills in *Commonweal* refers to some of these concerns: "A new awareness of the Church's specific kind of authority, of the meaning of doctrinal development, of the duty Catholics have toward problems of the social order (in this case, toward overpopulation), and of the problem of communicating with non-Catholics — all these demand the re-examination of this question, even apart from the problems that have arisen in this area to baffle the married Catholic and afflict the priest in the confessional."

Some of these chapters are extraordinarily interesting. "A History of Catholic Thinking on Contraception" by Daniel Sullivan recounts some rather disconcerting opinions in patristic and scholastic writings on women and sex. Frederick Flynn is excellent on "Birth Control and Over-popu-

lation." And "Married Love and Responsible Parenthood" by James Finn has a good balance of forthright criticism with a concern to preserve enduring Christian principles.

The Eternal Year

Karl Rahner, S.J., translated

by John Shea, S.S.

Helicon Press. \$3.50

In this book, which appeared in German some ten years ago, Father Rahner gives us some of his personal insights into the significance of sixteen feasts of the liturgical year. Most of the great Christian mysteries are included, from Advent to Pentecost. But his selection also embraces chapters on New Year's Day, St. Joseph, Corpus Christi and the Sacred Heart. The book is so refreshing that it raises hopes that Father Rahner will be persuaded to prepare similar reflections on other Christian feasts.

The author's intellectual honesty, learning and deep faith are in evidence on every page. But in this book (as in his two volumes of meditative prayers) the writer is primarily concerned with the relation of the Christian mysteries to the daily life of Christ's followers. One gets the impression that he is sharing the innermost thoughts of this scholarly, good priest as he himself prepares to celebrate the Mystery of Faith.

This surely must be the clearest and most readable of Father Rahner's books. Not only is it characterized by clarity, but the feasts and the symbols associated with them have stimulated his imagination to clothe his thoughts in vivid word pictures and memorable phrases. Much of the credit for this smoothness is due to the translator, Father Shea. And in the translator's preface, the latter provides an enlightening, succinct explanation of the liturgical year which provides a helpful backdrop for the

ensuing chapters. Highly recommended for meditative preparation for worship and for those who preach or catechize.

The Search for God

Robert W. Gleason, S.J.

Sheed and Ward. \$5.00

Father Gleason's book is a penetrating, compassionate study of modern unbelief. It is all the more effective in that he avoids polemics and apologetics, content to portray the many factors that have made so many men strangers to the One Ultimate Reality.

The author respects the learning and intelligence of the unbeliever and the many virtues he often displays. He analyzes the sense of sin and of evil, or the lack of them, and their influence on our awareness of God. He then traces the heritage of nineteenth century unbelief and the thought of such dissimilar writers as Newman, Sartre and Kierkegaard. There is a particularly absorbing chapter on "Israel's Experience of God." And many will appreciate the chapter which deals with new approaches to the existence of God and their relation to the teaching of Vatican I.

Varieties of Unbelief

Martin E. Marty

Holt, Rinehart and Winston. \$5.00

Despite the title, this book is primarily concerned not with militant unbelief nor the agonized incredulity of contemporary European intellectuals, but with the unbelief of many American Christian churchgoers. The author does devote his early pages to the radical incredulity of those like Sartre and the existentialists. But this is to contrast it with a homegrown kind of unbelief which, if less profound, is widely pervasive in our country.

The writer has amassed a considerable amount of evidence to document his case, and he catalogues its many varieties with the skill and objectivity of a sociologist. He sedulously avoids both indignation and condemnation, trusting the facts to reveal how thin the faith of many Christians has become. This he trusts will leave doors open to discussion and possible reform.

The author's chief thesis is that a form of "unbelief is institutionalized and present

as a more or less permanent cultural phenomenon" in the religion of America. It is the faith of those who assume that God approves and guarantees the worldly securities they strive for, not faith in a God who offers an otherworldly reward to those who honor His stern demands.

In this curious "creed" patriotism, individualism, competence, conformity and togetherness mark the virtuous man. Christian ethics and worship are not abandoned nor is a future heaven denied. But it represents a comfortable accommodation to an inherited Christian tradition which emasculates the "hard sayings" of the gospel. No one knows better than the author how much authentic Christianity is believed and practiced in our country. But the inroads of this "nearness of unbelief" inspires him to unmask its corrosive nature in the hope that it may be purified in frank dialogue and Christian renewal.

J.T.M.

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Guide Lights

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY . . .

Looking back over the reports of the different observances around the country during the annual week of prayer for unity, January 18-25, there were many fine examples of ecumenical action. In Berkeley, Calif., Father James Fisher, C.S.P., celebrated Mass in the Protestant Chapel of the Pacific School of Religion before a mixed congregation. In New York City, Msgr. Myles Bourke preached at a Vesper service in the Greek Orthodox Cathedral. In Seattle and in Albuquerque, large convocations of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox clergy and laity numbering thousands, assembled in prayer and friendship. Elsewhere in the country the story was the same. Christians met in groups in each other's churches, halls, and public places in order to bear witness by prayer and discussion to their common desire for unity.

This was the encouraging picture. Yet, at the same time there were disappointments, too. Everyone agrees that prayer is absolutely essential for progress in unity, yet in spite of the wide publicity which this week of prayer receives in the press, secular as well as religious (and the coverage is really astonishing), the actual number of those participating is not always impressive. Certainly, it does not compare with the swarm of devotees of St. Blaise who crowded the altar rails a week later to get their throats blessed.

Part of the reason is that the idea of unity as a positive mission of the Church has not yet laid hold of Catholics generally. Also, there are still some parishes that do not have any special unity devotions during this week, although there were probably fewer instances of such omission this year than ever before. However, even where there was ample opportunity and plenty of pastoral encouragement and exhortation, the turnout in some instances was disappointing. Why is this so?

REASON FOR JOINT SERVICES . . .

The main reason seems to be that prayer for unity must itself be a common undertaking. The best attendance and the most enthusiastic response is noticed in

those cases where the separated Christians join in the same service. Unity becomes desirable when people get a taste of it; and even the imperfect unity represented by a mixed congregation inspires the participants to do something about improving it. Where the Christian churches of a locality each hold their own service for their own people, even though the cause is common, something vital to the very notion of unity is missing.

In the past, this was perhaps unavoidable, given the tradition of aloofness and canonical restrictions. Since the Council teaching on Ecumenism, however, there is no longer any reason why this should be so. The Decree specifically singles out this week as one of the particular situations where prayer in common is not only permissible but to be actively encouraged. It is entirely in accordance with the spirit of the Decree that these services be held not in the parish halls or civic auditoriums and other public places, but in the churches themselves. The place for public prayer and devotion is properly a church, and when the prayer is itself a pleading for the reconciliation of separated communities, there is no better place symbolically to voice it than from the hearth of one of our broken homes. It will take some getting used to, but the conditions are ripe and with some instruction and encouragement from the pulpit, and more cooperation with other local churches, next January should see a great increase in this kind of participation and with it an upsurge in attendance figures.

OPERATION UNDERSTANDING . . .

Another kind of program for this week is the citywide open house invitation that the diocese of New Orleans sponsored. On a series of Sunday afternoons during the month of January, persons of various faiths were invited to visit Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish churches and synagogues where they were met by pastors and parishioners who explained their beliefs and worship. Thousands of people took advantage of these invitations and the psychological effect of such a large scale grass roots interchange will undoubtedly prepare a climate in New Orleans for deeper kinds of

dialogue and interfaith action. More of this kind of introductory education is needed if the ecumenical movement is to become a practical part of the Christian life.

PASTORAL PRINCIPLES OF ECUMENISM . . .

The February issue of *Worship* has a good article by Father Thomas A. O'Meara, O.P., on some of the pastoral principles of ecumenism. He, too, is concerned about translating the spirit of the Decree into realistic parochial programs if the mission of unity is to become a real part of the apostolate. As a guide for the Catholic pastor, he offers several ecumenical principles:

1. The Catholic pastor is the key to local ecumenism.

2. In Catholic ecclesiology, he has pastoral responsibility for all Christians in his parish. Through baptism, he has a personal relationship with each of them and all have a claim on his service.

3. The church activities of the other Christians in his area are participations in the life of the Church of Christ, and not merely imitations of it.

4. All of the other Christian pastors are sharers and co-workers in the Christian and ecclesial mission he represents.

5. Introduction of Protestant Christians to the Church is best done through her liturgy, for it is here that the encounter between the divine and the human that is the Church, is most vital.

SOME PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS . . .

Fidelity to these principles should insure that the Catholic pastor's relation with the other Christian churches will be both Catholic and fruitful. Some further particular applications of them to his personal relation with the other pastors are also suggested. As sharers in the mission Christ gave his Church, these ministers are, of course, entitled to respect, but this is not enough. Conflict among the harvesters or even silence, is a source of scandal to the community. Christian pastors should know one another personally and work together in everything that can lead to the moral and physical betterment of the community. Of course, many pastors have proceeded on these principles for years, but now it has become the recognized responsibility of the whole Church. Ecumenism began with a common Christian response to deadly challenges; it will grow and prosper by more of the same.

A PROBLEM AND AN ANSWER . . .

The progress of ecumenism is often

slow and sometimes thorny. Just when things seem clear and purposeful, something happens to blur the picture. One such incident was the recent address by Pope Paul at a regular weekly audience on the subject of Christian unity. In it, he stressed the dangers of playing down controversial Catholic teachings in the interest of unity and reminded his audience that this does not serve the cause of truth. Elsewhere in his talk, he gave encouragement to ecumenical dialogue and exhorted the Catholic faithful to carry out the Council's Decree on Ecumenism. However, the bulk of his address unquestionably dealt with the "temptations," and naturally this raised questions in the minds of many. The best information available on the context of this address indicates that the Holy Father had in mind a particular situation in one part of Europe. Events there are far beyond the kind of ecumenical activity that is taking place in the United States. Certainly, his remarks apply to all Catholics, but it seems clear that current ecumenical activity in this country is more in line with what he encouraged in his address than what he warned against.

A good rule here, as elsewhere, is: he who has ears to hear, let him hear.

CONVERSIONS AGAIN . . .

Bishop Stephen A. Leven, auxiliary of San Antonio, recently participated in an ecumenical seminar in Washington. In discussing reasons for the decline in conversions, he gave as his firm conviction that the affluent society is the principal cause. American preoccupation with material things and the relatively large increase in personal wealth have a lot to do with distracting people from the kind of personal crisis involved in conversions. A lot of people would agree with this statement, and if the "Great Society" comes about, the trend will probably grow.

AFTER-CARE OF NEW CATHOLICS . . .

A recent notice from the National Guilds of St. Paul announcing January 24th as a general Communion day for 400 parish guilds, reminds us of the continuing need of new Catholics during the difficult period of transition following baptism. Msgr. Leonard Nienaber and the Guilds of St. Paul have pioneered in this field and many of the things they have done should be worked into the renewal of the parish, and particularly, into the coming catechumenate.

JOSEPH V. GALLAGHER, C.S.P.



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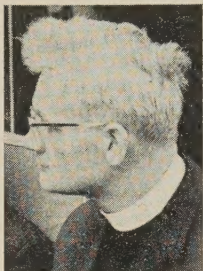
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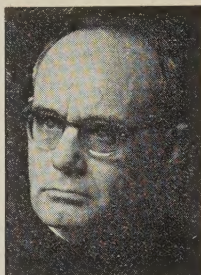
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